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## ABOUT BRIC-À-BRAC.

THE fascination exercised by the ceramic art over connoisseurs and collectors cannot easily be explained to those who have not felt this spell. Charles Sumner, who set a high value on time, spent an entire afternoon examining the hoard of a real knight-errant of *bric-à-brac*—one who can spy a rare Sèvres teacup a mile off, and scent an old collection of knickknacks across a continent. The tulip mania of Holland and the bibliomania of the nineteenth century are insignificant when compared with the existing madness for *bric-à-brac*. Nearly \$40,000 have been paid for a pair of vases, eleven and a half inches high, and of rare though not æsthetically beautiful form, and again a bureau, inlaid with celebrated Sèvres plaques, brought \$100,000! The sum of \$250,000 was expended in ten years by an English collector in the purchase of a marvellous and inordinate hoard of old pottery and porcelain, of all shapes, sizes, ages, nations, and dates. He gave to his visitors Russian tea in a cup which, with the saucer, cost \$300, and took tea himself in another pair which cost \$500. A Parisian collector of arms and other *bric-à-brac* gave at one time \$2,500 for a small dagger worn by Henry of France and Navarre, during the ceremony of his marriage with the fair Marguerite de Valois; and \$1,725 was given by Colonel Drummond, of the English Army, for the gold-piece presented, when on the scaffold at Whitehall, by Charles I. to Bishop Juxon. One of Sir Isaac Newton's teeth, set in a ring, cost the eccentric English earl who wears it, and who is a thoroughgoing *bric-à-brackist*, the goodly sum of \$3,650.

What is *bric-à-brac*?

As to its derivation, Littré claims it comes from the French *de bric et de broc*, by hook or by crook; or it may come from *bric*, trap, connected with the German *brechen*, to break, and *broc*, jug, for *broche*. It may be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *bric*, meaning a fragment; and, as a *bric-à-brackist* is one who collects fragments of Art, this may be the best *unde derivatur*. There is a *bric-à-brac* in literature as well as in Art, and when an accomplished American poet put forth the first volume of his very pleasant "Bric-à-brac Series," a rural swain wanted to know of his bookseller why it was called the "Brickbat Series." Considering the real character of *bric-à-brac* in general, could a more charming and unconsciously happy definition be hit upon?

An anonymous writer has said that *bric-à-brac* means *not* choice bits, but literally "odds and ends," broken fragments, rubbish, etc., and is a phrase made by onomatopœia, as Max Müller would say, from the sound made by smashing a thing. A well-known *littérateur* has remarked that there is not an etymology to help us.

The phrase *bric-à-brac* is one belonging to wealthy dilettanti rather than to men of learning or the general public. Be this as it may, the antique gem or coin, or the characteristic piece of pottery and porcelain, often brings a closer and more accurate knowledge of the real life of a community or nation than a formal history can do, just as we learn much more concerning the illustrious men of their time with whom they were acquainted, from the pages of Pepys and Evelyn, and the gossip of James Boswell, than we can from the volumes of the more dignified biographer.

The *bric-à-brac* hunter necessarily enriches his mind with much curious historical information, so that the pursuit of such trifles cannot be considered a perfectly useless method of disposing of *hora subsessivæ* and superfluous shekels.

The monetary value of "bits" of ceramics is decided by their ages and rarity quite as much as by their actual artistic excellence. And yet such cherished specimens are not to be regarded as mere curiosities. They occupy a certain and easily defined place in a history which begins not with civilization, but with mankind. Baking clay and making vessels is one of the first useful arts in the history of all nations and peoples, savage as well as civilized, and was long ago practised in forms which we can now only follow at a distance. Age in many cases not only confers dignity, but is the brand of excellence. The art has its secrets, it has been said, which, no more than literary ability, can be handed down to successors.

Probably the modern ardor for making collections of *bric-à-brac* dates from the middle of the past century, although the worthy Robert Burton makes mention of the "antiquary who consumes his treasure and his time to scrape a company of old coins, statues, manuscripts, etc.," from which it would appear that some collectors existed at least as early as the days of Shakespeare; and a contemporary of Chaucer writes the following words of warning to *virtuosos* intending to travel on the continent: "Be warre atte Venyse and atte alle such other places as ye finden eny precious stones, Jewelles, or Reliques ynnre, for meny that ben right slye will be right besy to desseyve you and yours." Horace Walpole, who visited France in the time of Louis XIV., was greatly delighted with

the profusion of porcelain, ormolu, bronze, and other *bric-à-brac*, which he found in the houses of the great nobles at Paris. Walpole introduced and stimulated this taste in England, forming the famous collection which was sold years ago at Strawberry Hill. William Beckford, another famous *bric-à-brackist* and bibliomaniac, formed a marvellous collection at Fonthill, the sale of which occupied several weeks, as did the dispersion at auction sale of the interesting collection at Stowe, belonging to the Duke of Buckingham. In 1870 Prince Demidoff removed his *bric-à-brac* to Paris, and it was sold at unheard-of sums, far in excess of the high prices obtained at the Walpole, Beckford, and Buckingham sales. In 1874 the important collection of ceramics and other curiosities made by the late Francis Forbes, during a diplomatic service of sixty years, was sold in London, including among other relics a watch bearing the inscription: "*Horologium Taddæi Kosciusko viri immortalis Pynus amicitia Georgii Washingtonii, 1783.*" There was also sold in 1874 the famous Eakins *bric-à-brac*, consisting chiefly of English china and porcelain.

Another collection of old ware, belonging to Mr. Winter, of Birk-enham, was sold in England in 1876. A pair of Sèvres vases brought nearly \$10,000. Two persons claimed the bid, and the dispute between them waxing warm, ended in a scuffle, in which one of the vases was smashed into fragments. The auctioneer stopped the sale until the disputants left the mansion. Upon its resumption the competition was particularly keen for the possession of the Sèvres china. A pair of vases was sold to the Earl of Dudley for almost \$40,000 gold (the exact sum was 7,500 guineas), and the Duke of Portland paid \$25,000 for three other small vases. Baron Rothschild bought an antique silver salt cellar for \$1,750, and has also paid \$535 for a single Sèvres teacup.

The fashion of forming collections of *bric-à-brac* has been rapidly increasing in this country. Old china, which once may have been valuable as heirlooms, but not otherwise, is now brought out and sold at fabulous prices to *bric-à-bracqueurs*. That this interest has secured a strong foothold in New York is abundantly shown by the number of visitors standing before the case of ceramics which are on exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and by the large purchases made by societies and individuals at the Centennial and Chicago Exhibitions. The Metropolitan Museum purchased the Di Cesnola collections of ceramics for something over \$100,000. Even governments join in the pursuit and purchase of *bric-à-brac* and relics. The State of New York has given \$20,000 for the sword sent by Frederick the Great to Washington, and a few other souvenirs of the *Pater Patria*. Three millions of dollars each would be a moderate estimate of the amount expended by the authorities of the British Museum and the Louvre in the purchase of what may very properly be designated as *bric-à-brac*.

Some of the prices paid by collectors of various descriptions may not be without interest. The late Giucowar of Baroda, a great lover of grandeur and jewelry, was supposed to have had the most magnificent coat ever made in India, or in the wide world, it having cost \$275,000. But this bejewelled garment was eclipsed by one worn by the Maharajah of Puttiala at the *darbar* of Lord Lytton, and which, as stated on the authority of the *Delhi Gazette*, cost \$675,000! It was covered with diamonds and other precious stones, and fringed about the collar, cuffs, and front with large pearls. The sum of \$100,000 was paid by a French collector for a bureau presented by George III. to the grandmother of the Marquis of Conyngham, who, preferring a yacht to the historical bureau inlaid with celebrated Sèvres plaques, sold it for the sum named.

Rembrandt's etching, "Christ Healing the Sick," known as the "Hundred Guilder" print—fifteen inches by eleven—was sold in 1865 for \$5,900; and, in 1874, a copy of an engraving by Marc Antonia, of Aretino, smaller than a page of this journal, brought the sum of \$3,900. More than this amount has been paid for a tall copy of the first edition of Shakespeare, for a Mazarin Bible, and for Menzie's illustrated copy of Irving's "Washington." A New York bookseller once sold a volume containing some four or five score specimens of old lace for \$150; and a copy of the "Bay State Psalm-Book," printed at Cambridge in 1640, was sold in Boston for \$1,025. A larger price has been paid for Eliot's Indian Bible, which only two persons on the face of the earth can read! An old manuscript of the ninth century brought \$3,900, and a Mexican or Aztec manuscript sold for \$525. An English collector gave fifty dollars for eight American half-pennies of 1776, and a New Yorker paid ten dollars for a ten-cent brown paper stamp of Bolivia.

The famous Peachblow Vase at the Morgan sale was knocked down for 18,000 dollars. A similar vase was sold later for 6,000 dollars, and some with forms of the same color have been placed at from 2,500 to 4,000 dollars each. Mr. Garland is supposed to have paid over \$5,000 for his black enamel vase with red hawthorn blossoms now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Mr. Altman has some hawthorn ginger jars which have cost him over \$4,000 each. He

has paid sums of 3,000 dollars and more for fine *sang-de-bœuf* porcelain. Mr. J. W. Ellsworth has a ruby red worth 5,000 dollars among his fine collection. Mr. M. J. Perry paid 5,000 dollars for a *rose du Barry* in the Dana sale. Tall black enamel hawthorn blossom vases fetch from 2,000 to 5,000 dollars, according to their perfection.

A collector of clocks—of which he boasts that he has one hundred and fifty-seven, all good time-keepers—gave \$5,100 for an ebony and bronze clock of the period of Louis XIV.; and at the same sale a *bric-a-brac*ist paid \$1,400 for a tapestry screen of Gobelin manufacture, and half that amount for a bottle of gray stoneware enamelled with blue and gray. A Hungarian nobleman gave \$2,000 for a violin which was made and sold by Jacob Stainer on very singular conditions.

This nobleman, connected with the court of Charles VI., Emperor of Germany, paid Stainer sixty-six golden caroluses in cash, undertaking also to supply him with a good dinner every day, one hundred florins every month, a new suit of clothes every year, as well as two casks of beer, lodging, firing, and lighting. As Stainer lived sixteen years after the sale was consummated, it may be asserted with safety that Count Trauttmansdorff gave the highest price ever known to have been paid for a violin. It must have cost him at least 40,000 florins. More than \$3,000 has been paid for a Stradivarius; and a Joseph Guarnerius has been sold in London for \$3,150. Another "King Joseph," as his violins are called by connoisseurs, brought \$3,500.

One hundred thousand dollars has been spent for a collection of orchids; and fortunes for the filling of a "china-room" to contain collections of ceramics. The two pens used in signing the Treaty of Amiens were sold for \$2,500; and the coat worn by Charles XII. at Pultowa is said to have been sold for \$30,000.

Indulging in a "taste" for *bric-a-brac*, rare books, and manuscripts, the fine arts, or any other hobby, if it is done discreetly, may perhaps prove to be both a pleasant and profitable pursuit, as was the case when a cautious collector of ceramics sold his knick-knacks, on which he had expended less than \$3,000, for \$10,000; when an American autograph hunter left nearly 100,000 specimens, for not one of which he ever paid a single penny, and for which his heirs asked \$50,000; when an English pen-maker's pictures were sold by his executors for nearly three times their cost; when a bibliomaniac disposed of his library, containing, among other curiosities, four of Wycliffe's tracts, which cost him precisely four shillings, for \$2,000; or when a collector of relics parted with his gleanings of two-score years, and mostly gathered without cost, for some \$20,000. But if a "taste" be indulged in without judgment, it is very certain to prove an exceedingly expensive luxury, as—to give a single instance—in the case of Boydell, who hopelessly ruined himself by illustrating Shakespeare at a cost of nearly \$2,000,000!

Charles Dickens commissioned Frith to paint, for the sum of \$100, the picture of Dolly Varden. At the sale of the great novelist's collection this work brought \$5,300; and some articles of *bric-a-brac*, which cost Dickens \$3,000, brought nearly \$50,000.

W. G. J.

## ROMANCE OF SPANISH ARTISTS.

AMONG Spanish painters there is no dearer name than that of Murillo. He was a true knight of art, consecrated soul and body to the divine gift. For him all created beings had a sacredness in his eyes, and he painted the wretched beggar in the meanest hovel with the same love as if she were a queen of heaven. Like Fra Angelico, he went to his palette from prayer. He married at twenty-seven a young Spanish beauty, and he proved to be as good a husband as he was great a painter. The "Virgins" of his pictures are all gracious and tender creatures, and he was never known to paint the figure of a nude woman. His genius had a chasteness in keeping with his piety. Once, when asked why he did not finish certain pictures, he replied, "I await, inspired, that which Christ shall come to tell me." His life was a tranquil one, beautified with noble deeds and marked generosity. He died, full of love and honor, at the age of ninety-one.

Velasquez, whom no painter has ever equalled as a naturalist, seems to have enjoyed a complete life. He had an air so distinguished that one fancied him a born prince. His face and manner were most winning; he dressed in a style the most tasteful and *recherché*, and his manners were most noble. He married Juana, a daughter of the painter Pacheco, a man of rare talent; whose child

was worthy of her father. The endearment of their union may be inferred from the fact that she died seven days after Velasquez—a victim to insupportable grief. Rich in incidents as was the life of this artist, no one of them is of a more interesting nature than his relations with his slave, Juan de Pareja. There were many slaves in Seville at that time, and it is not known whether Pareja was one of inheritance or purchase. Velasquez employed him in his studio to mix his colors, clean his brushes, and prepare his canvases. He was of extreme intelligence, and his first work in painting was done in secret, in hours when he was unemployed by his master. One day Philip IV., seeing a picture which greatly pleased him, asked who painted it. He was shown the slave-painter, who fell on his knees before the sovereign in the presence of Velasquez. "He who has so much merit cannot be a slave," said Philip, and Velasquez, who was the soul of generosity, gave Pareja his freedom on the spot, and taking him for his pupil, took him with him in his voyages into Italy. He remained with his master until his death, which occurred in his sixty-first year. Pareja then passed the remainder of his days with Iona Velasquez, who had married Martinez del Mazo, the eminent landscapist. His death took place in 1670, at the age of sixty-four.

Luis de Morales, surnamed "*El Divino*," because he only painted sacred subjects, lived royally the first half of his life, but, losing his fortune and his eyesight, he died in the most complete misery, leaving a son.

Isidore Arredondo, the historical painter, resolved to lead a bachelor's life, and, to keep his heart warm, adopted a little Spanish girl, to whom he stood in the relation of guardian, and afterwards married her.

Alphonse Cairo, who was a sort of Spanish Michael Angelo for genius, and fought duels, was suspected of murdering his wife and was put to the torture. He, however, kept his lips sealed, and he survived the rack of confession. The truth was never known. The event increased his reputation, and he had a most successful career.

Fernando Navarrete, grand as an historical painter, became deaf and dumb at thirteen years of age, which never seemed, however, to modify his talent for painting. He never married, but led a gay and cheerful life and was much beloved by his friends. "His mother, who was beautiful, served as his models for angels and "Virgins," and his father was painted for apostles, as he had great taste for biblical subjects. So great was his talent and versatility that he was called the Titian of Spain.

MARY W.

## WHY AMERICAN ART LANGUISHES.

A LEADING American artist was asked why he confined himself to portraits, small pictures, and foreign ideas, instead of undertaking something that would really make a sensation in art circles—some big American subject that would be worthy of his talent. He replied that he would do so gladly if he could, but he could not afford it. To paint such a picture would cost, allowing himself carpenter's wages, from \$1,200 to \$2,000. Models must be hired, researches undertaken, and costly material purchased. Then, when it was done, the chances were, he thought, that every one would admire it and no one buy it. This would mean the loss of a year's time and considerable money, which he could not afford. On the other hand, the wealthy artists are not spurred on by necessity. They either don't have to paint at all or their reputation brings a ready sale for anything whatever which they wish to paint. He averred that every painting of the kind of recent years has been either painted to order or with a tacit understanding that some patron was to see the artist through. There is no stimulus to original American art except the few rewards offered by art associations, which are almost universally carried off by Salon pictures or pictures with foreign treatment. This artist referred to has a great picture that he wants to paint. He cannot do it unless some man of wealth stands sponsor for it. To do so without aid or encouragement would be as reasonable as for a Market-street merchant to embark all his goods on a sailing vessel and take a voyage to the cannibal islands in the hope of a lucrative trade. Artists without capital or patrons won't undertake big work. Artists with capital and reputation have no reason to. Why don't some of our wealthy men undertake to encourage art by agreeing to stand sponsor to some of our rising artists? The Government fosters art in France. Here the Government ruins it; for once in a while it buys a bad picture at an enormous price and is so overcome with its virtuous action that it has to rest several years before trying again.—*Philadelphia Inquirer*.